

Acknowledgements

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Sightings of Kelp Gull *Larus dominicanus* in the Tsiribihina Delta, west-central Madagascar

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Observations du Goéland dominicain *Larus dominicanus* dans le delta du Tsiribihina, au centre-ouest de Madagascar. Lors des dénombrements d'oiseaux d'eau dans le delta du fleuve Tsiribihina, cinq Goélans dominicains *Larus dominicanus* ont été observés en mars 2006, quatre en juillet 2006 et cinq en mars 2007. Auparavant, cette espèce n'avait été observée à Madagascar que dans les zones humides côtières entre Toliara, 430 km au sud du delta du Tsiribihina, et Fort Dauphin (Tolagnaro).

During waterbird population surveys in the Tsiribihina Delta, west-central Madagascar, in 2006–07, several Kelp Gulls *Larus dominicanus* were observed by the Madagascar Teal Project team of the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust Madagascar Programme. Two were at Soarano (19°38'S 44°23'E) on 19 March 2006, three at Ambozaka (19°37'S 44°23'E) on 21 March 2006 and two in the same place on 20 and 27 July 2006—when there were another two at Namangoa Bay (19°52'S 44°27'E)—and five on 16 March 2007. All of the birds were on sandy islets, c.200–400 m offshore, and are apparently the first observations for this area.

Kelp Gull is characterised by its white head, neck, throat and tail, and black back and wings, with the exception of the white primary tips. The bill and legs are olive, and the orbital ring is red. These features were clearly observed on all of the

individuals and I am familiar with Kelp Gull at Fort Dauphin. The species is easy to distinguish from Grey-headed Gull *L. cirrocephalus*, the only other gull regularly found at Madagascar's wetlands, because of its larger size, black back, white head and throat, and yellow bill. Lesser Black-backed Gull *L. fuscus* has not been recorded in Madagascar but, with sightings in East Africa and Seychelles (Skerrett *et al.* 2001, Stevenson & Fanshawe 2002), could possibly occur. None of the birds reported had the yellow legs characteristic of Lesser Black-backed Gull, and Kelp Gull seems more likely in this area.

Kelp Gull is widespread in the Southern Hemisphere, in Africa, South America, Australasia and on many islands in the Southern Ocean (Higgins & Davies 1996). In Madagascar it is represented by the recently described endemic subspecies *melisandae*, which is restricted to south-west

coastal areas between Toliara and Fort Dauphin (Morris & Hawkins 1998), with one observation from between Manakara and Maroansetra on the east coast (Langrand 1995). Although waterbirds had been surveyed in the Tsiribihina Delta previously, Kelp Gull had never been observed there (Safford 1993, Projet ZICOMA unpubl. reports). Regular bird monitoring at the Mangoky Delta, between Toliara and the Tsiribihina, has not produced any sightings either (R. Rabarisoa, ASITY Madagascar, *in litt.* 2008). Thus, there appear to be no published records north of Toliara.

The sightings reported here increase the known range of Kelp Gull in Madagascar by 430 km to the north. It is recommended that observers look out for this species on suitable stretches of Madagascar's west coast.

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